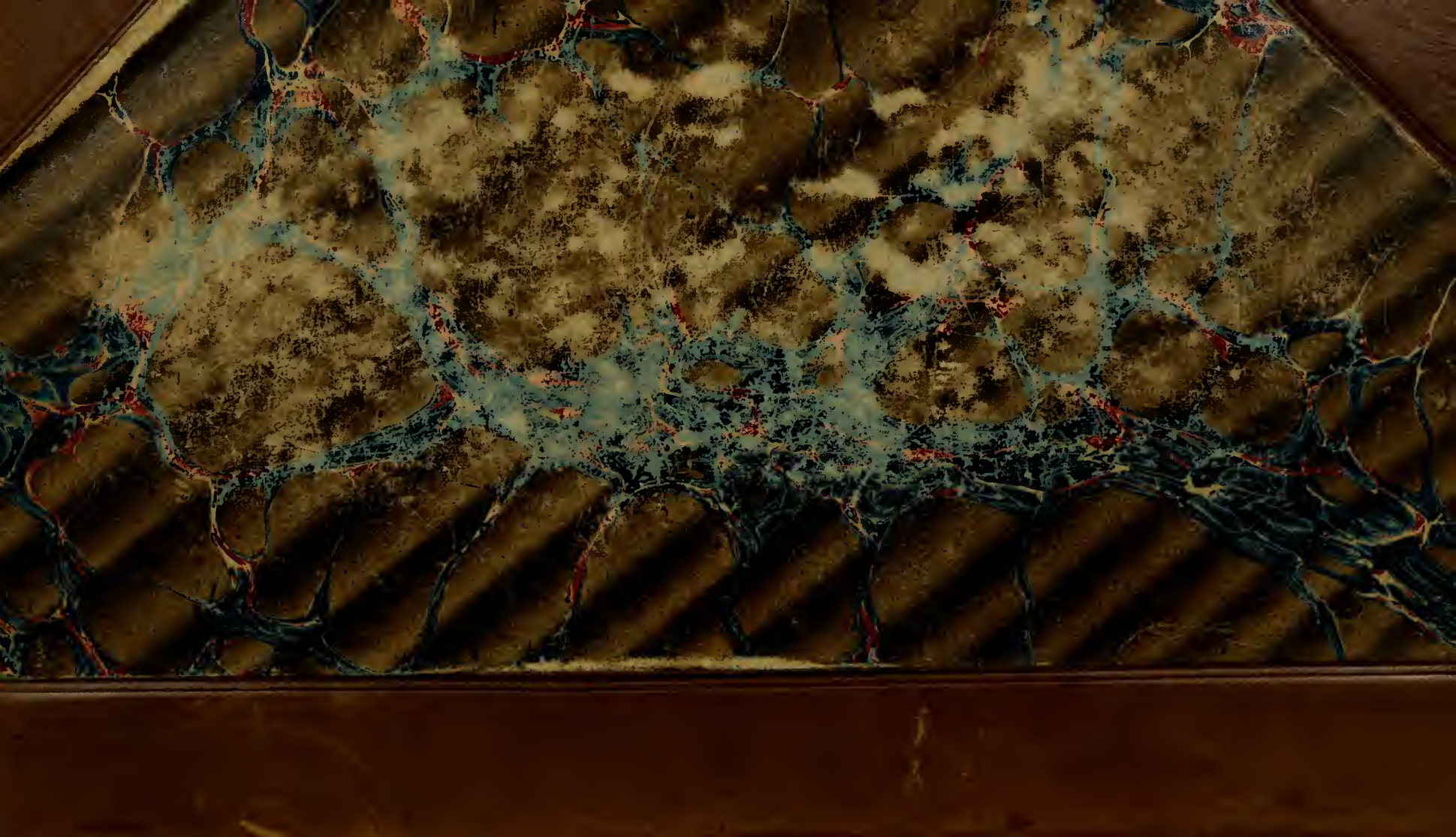

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NAVVIES & THEIR NEEDS.

BY THE

REV. L. M. EVANS, B.A.,

RECTOR OF LEATHLEY.

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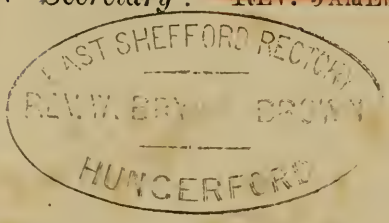

NAVVIES AND THEIR NEEDS.

CHAPTER I.

IT may be doubted whether there is in England any class of men which, as a class, has produced greater results and attracted less attention than the navvies. Some of my readers will doubt, perhaps, whether I am justified in speaking of them as a class distinct in any sense from the working class in general. Others, on the other hand, may, I fear, have learnt to think of them as not only excluded from any recognised class of men, but as hardly belonging to the race of man at all. My chief objects in this and subsequent papers will be—first, to claim for my navvy friends a place, and a very respectable place, in the genus *homo*, and next, to show that I am justified in speaking of them as forming a distinct species of working men—a species, too, of more than common interest, one that has been formed in our own time by a process of natural selection, the survival of the fittest; one that appears to have become more distinct and better defined since its first development. It is also one that may justly complain of neglect, although claiming, and ready amply to reward, the attention of the student in human nature, of the philanthropist, and above all, of the Christian and the evangelist. There are some points of resemblance

between the navvies as a class and the gipsies, of whom we have lately heard so much. But in any comparison of the two the gipsy must, I think, yield to the navvy on the score of interest and of merit. They are alike in that both differ widely in their haunts and habits from their fellow-men. Each may be regarded as a distinct species, but the gipsy forms a foreign, the navvy a native species. The species gipsy is ancient, effete, and dying out; the species navvy is young, vigorous, and still developing. The gipsy is chiefly interesting in romance, and notable for his preference for a dishonest to an honest mode of life; the navvy for the sterling worth, reality, and honesty of his work. One reason, no doubt, why the navvy has attracted so little attention is that he is generally to be found and his work is most frequently done in out-of-the-way places, far from the busy haunts of men. Fifty years ago the railway began its mighty march in England, the pioneer of an advanced civilisation, but the navvy has been the pioneer of every railway that we have. And as now we pass in rapid travel from end to end of England over the smooth and level iron road, each embankment, every cutting, every tunnel, bridge, and viaduct, yes, every foot of road bears witness to the hard and patient toil of many a thousand navvy hands. The navvies have been everywhere before us, and have passed on out of sight; they have no doubt sadly scratched and disfigured the face of their country, but how fruitful have their scratches been. They have left, alas! in many places whither they came sad memories of the ill they did, ill we think that for the most part would never have been done had it not been forgotten by those who sent them that their navvy servants had human hearts and immortal souls as

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well as broad backs and sinewy arms. Besides the construction of railways there is another class of works on which navvies have of late years been very largely employed—the making, namely, of reservoirs for the water supply of large towns; especially in the north of England with its many densely populated centres of industry is this the case. The natural water supply—the stream flowing from the distant moor, pure and limpid till it reaches the first large village or town upon its banks—is fouled by dyes and sewerage and abominations of every kind, and flows on to be rendered ever more and more foul by every town it passes till it reaches the sea. Meanwhile the dwellers in the towns must seek elsewhere for the supply of pure water, so essential to their life, and often they are driven far-a-field in their search. Perhaps they find at last some distant moorland stream still undefiled, and flowing, probably, down some remote valley innocent of coal, unexplored by any railway, and possessing only a thinly-scattered agricultural population. An Act of Parliament gives them the right to take thence the water that they need. But before they can take it they must store it up in a reservoir, or perhaps, in several reservoirs, constructed on the course of the stream one above another.

I know of one town in Yorkshire where the water supply is being secured by the formation of four such reservoirs, whence it will flow through pipes a distance of some fifteen miles. The probable cost of the work is more than a million, the probable time that it must occupy more than ten years, the probable number of men employed during that time it would be difficult to estimate; and this is but one instance out of many, although no doubt the works in progress are in this case

on a larger scale than in most others.

It is when employed on works like these that the navvies are found gathered in the greatest numbers, and that their needs cry out most loudly. Their work often lies so far from town or village that it is necessary to find for them accommodation on the spot. Huts are built, and mushroom villages, sometimes of considerable size, spring up and remain for years. It is in such places that the best opportunites are found, as well as the most pressing need for ministering to the social, intellectual, and above all the spiritual needs of the navvies. It was in such a village—of which I hope before long to give my readers a fuller description—that my first acquaintance was formed with the species navvy. But before I do so I should like to introduce to them an individual of the species, and to let him tell in his own words something of himself and his fellows, and of their manner of life.

I chanced one day to get into a third-class carriage on one of our northern railways, and to travel some distance with a navvy as my sole companion. There was a time when I should have preferred to get into another carriage, but having learnt to take a friendly interest in navvies generally, I rather rejoiced at the opportunity of friendly communication with any member of the class. In this case my friend was a man of middle age. Rather above the middle height, he displayed a breadth and depth of chest which told plainly enough of strength and endurance. His features and fair complexion were of the type so distinctively English. He had on the thick nailed boots, the canvas trousers, and pea-jacket, which, with the soft wide-awake hat, complete the dress of the true navvy ; between his knees

he held a bundle containing probably all his worldly goods, tied up in a white smock, the sleeves of which he held in his hands. As I looked at him, he sat gazing out of the window with his light blue eyes, little inclined, it seemed, to speak. When I addressed him, however, he proved ready enough to talk. After a few preliminaries, I began to ask some questions about navvies in general, their work and life. It was in reply to some question of this kind that he answered, with a touch of bitterness in his tone :—

"Outlaws, sir, that's what we are. Wanderers on the face of the earth, and outcasts from the society of all decent people."

"Well," I answered, "your occupation makes you more or less wanderers, but if you conduct yourselves decently why should decent society cast you out."

"Aye, sir, that's where it is. Why should it? But it does. Give a dog a bad name, you know, and you might as well hang him straight off. Of course, I knows well enough that some of our chaps gets a bad name for themselves, and deserves it. I doubt there's a good many blackguards among us, more's the pity, but we aint all bad, and there's some of us goes to the bad because nobody won't allow as we're fit for aught else."

"Nay, surely you make matters out to be worse than they are."

"Well, sir, I've been at this job a good bit now, and I've been up and down and all over, and I've seen a deal: and I'll just tell you how it is. Decent people, them as lives in towns and villages and has homes of their own and no occasion to tramp, they gets a notion into their heads as we belongs to a different breed from what they do. They reckon us a sort of big strong

beasts, very useful in our way, but terrible dangerous and not of much account except for strength. Why, it was only t'other day as I heard a woman telling about a railway accident, and she said as there was three men killed and a *navvy*. That's the way, sir. We aint *men* at all, we aint got no feelings nor no soul, nor nothing but just strong backs and arms and a big swallow for beer. Ha! ha! it makes me laugh sometimes does folks' ignorance; but it's a sad job too, sir—it's a very sad job, for it's the spoiling of many a young fellow as might be kept straight with just a little kindness."

"I fancy that something has helped to keep you straight," I said.

"Aye, sir, you're right there,"

And my friend who had been voluble before, suddenly relapsed into silence. His last answer had been spoken in a low tone. He looked down and played with a kit between his knees. I saw I had touched a tender point, but I wanted to hear more, so I waited in silence. At last he looked up.

"I see you're a parson, sir, and if you wasn't I don't fancy you're the sort to laugh at a chap, so I'll just tell how it was. You fancy something has kept me straight. I expect you mean I don't look like a drunken blackguard, and I've got a decent jacket and a good kit to carry. Well, if you'd seen me five years ago you'd have fancied something different I can tell you. I don't fancy you'd have got into the same carriage with me at all. I just was a villain, and I dare say I looked it too. You'd have been more likely to have met me tramping it on the road, or if I'd got a shilling, you might have sought me in the nearest public; and I'd nothing

better than a dirty old smock to my back, nor I wasn't troubled with no luggage. If ever a man went right away to the bad I'm the man. I started bad, for I run away from home. It wasn't much of a home, right enough, but I didn't go the way to mend it. However, I ran away, and when I'd spent all my money I sold the clothes I had, and bought a smock and some canvas trousers, and just tramped to the nearest work. What made me take to navvying? Why, you see I'd lit upon some chaps as was navvies, and they told me about the big wages they'd earned, and the free sort of life it was. Well, I worked first on one job, then on another; sometimes I'd plenty of money, and then I'd pack up and go on tramp for a bit till it was all gone, and I had to work again. Well, you see, sir, at all the works I went to I never met with any one as cared to make me any better than I was. I wasn't as bad as some of my mates, but we was none of us good. We mostly worked hard all the week through, and then when Saturday night came we'd start a-drinking, and you may guess what sort of a day Sunday was. Yes, sometimes there'd be a Scripture reader come among us, and give tracts about at dinner-time, and talk a bit. When I worked on the——railway we had one. But he had to travel up and down the line, and we didn't see much of him. Sometimes there'd be a preacher come on a Sunday, but he didn't find many to listen to him. He should have been there on Saturday by right. You see, sir, there was nothing done for us in a regular way. Of course, we didn't want anything doing; we never complained about it, though I fancy some of us felt it sometimes. There was one place where we used to work, and the huts were built in a field by the side

of a river over which a viaduct had to be built. Just across the river was a village, and a pretty little church in the middle of it, and on Sunday when the bells rang for service, and we could see the people turning out in their smart clothes, looking so trim and happy, I think some of us used to feel what a difference there was between us and them. And then, when the bells stopped, and all was still, there was an odd sort of feeling, as if we were shut out, like them the Bible tells of who came too late. Of course, we might have gone if we'd liked. But we didn't think so We didn't think we should be welcome there. Folks would have stared at us, and whispered, and indeed we didn't know whether they'd have let us in at all without a black coat, and it was only very few of us had that. Many a time I lay on the river bank listening to the bells, and watching the people, and sometimes I fancy those bells preached the first sermon I ever got any good from. When I left that work, I tramped a long way, just working a week here and a week there, and never settling. I felt sick and weary of the bad ways I'd got into, and yet I didn't know how to get out of them. Well, it happened about Christmas-time, about five years ago. I'd been tramping all the week, and on Christmas night was getting to the end of my journey. It was in Yorkshire. The snow was lying pretty deep, and I'd lost my way on a high, bleak moor. I stopped at a farm-house to ask the way to the work I was seeking, and they showed me a short way down through a dark wood. I was beginning to think I had lost the way again, and I felt down about it, for I was tired out, when all of a sudden I saw a bright light in front of me, shining on the path. I've often thought of it since,

how I walked that night out of darkness into light in more ways than one. I stopped a bit to see where the light came from, and while I waited I heard the sound of singing. I listened, and it was 'Hark, the herald angels sing?' I knew that hymn, for I'd heard it and sung it many a time when I was a boy. It seemed like an old friend to welcome me. So I walked on a bit nearer, and then I found that the light and the singing came from a little church. It seemed a queer little place. It was built of wood, and had great square windows, just like a house. I got close up, and looked in at one of the windows, and saw the place was pretty full. It was full of navvies too. There were some in their Sunday clothes, but some in nothing better than their working smocks, and one or two with their sleeves rolled up, as if they'd just come off work. There was a sort of desk at one end, and a clergyman standing at it. Well, I thought it was a queer start, and I was just passing on, but as I went by the door it was just a bit open, and I looked in again. It looked so bright and warm, and nobody there but working people, that I plucked up courage and stepped in. I stood there with the rest, and nobody took any notice, only one man gave me a hymn-book, but that warn't much use to me, for I couldn't read a word. When they stopped singing there was a prayer, and then the clergyman preached. I was glad to sit down and rest, and at first I felt sleepy with the warmth, but I got looking at the clergyman, and then I couldn't take my eyes off him. For he talked so much in earnest, and what he said sounded so strange and new to me, and yet so simple too, that I couldn't help listening. I don't think I shall ever forget that sermon. It was about those words,

'The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.' He told us about the Saviour who came at Christmas time, all out of love for us; and the best of it was that he made it so plain that it meant us, and not only better sort of people, I just felt as if I'd found some one who cared for me. And indeed, sir, so I had. I've learnt more about it since then, and I do know now that there is One who cares for us navvies, aye, even for the worst of us; and, thank God, I've learnt to care for Him too.

"I expect, sir, I've tired you with my talk. I shall have to get off at the station we're coming to; but I'll just show you something as I've brought away from yon place." And so saying he produced from the inner recesses of his pea-jacket from one pocket a good-sized reference Bible, and from another a prayer-book and hymn-book bound together.

"Can you read these now?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, I've learnt to read and write too. You see I've been well off these last five years, and I've got something to show for the time; but I'm fearful sometimes how it'll be with me now. I'd never have left ——, but you see the work was done, and I was forced to come away. I wish I could give up navvying altogether, and yet sometimes I think I should like to help other navvies to what I've got myself. I'm going now to some works near ——, and I fancy nothing is being done there for the good of the men. I've learnt the value of going to church, and I mean to go if I have to walk miles for it, but what we want is more work like that I've been telling you of—regular work among the navvies themselves. You see, sir, we're most of us very ignorant, and it isn't likely as we can

teach ourselves, and we want some one to come to us and find us out and teach us."

CHAPTER II.

IN my last paper I promised a description of a navvy village. Will my readers spend a Sunday with me at L—— W——, and let me show them, not only the village itself, but its inhabitants—something of the outer and inner life of the place, and something, too, of the work which was carried on there not by, but for the navvies. L—— W——is a place that was. I saw it rise, watched its life, and have looked on the deep waters which roll over the place where it stood. It has passed away, and the busy crowd that peopled it, but the memory of it lives, and something more—the lessons that were learnt there, lessons some of which I would impart to my readers, lessons which will, I trust, bear their fruit, a harvest of widespread and undying good. I must preface further that in writing of the work done at L—— W——, a work in which I had a happy share, it is very far from my purpose to write about myself. By far the greater part of the work was done by lay helpers, a kind and most helpful band, without whose assistance my own efforts would have been of little avail. We worked together, very closely united by our common aim, and, I think, never stopping to ask whose share was the largest. In speaking, therefore, of these things we did and tried to do, I shall speak always of "our work," begging the reader to remember thas his attention is asked only to the work.

We set out, then, on Sunday morning in good time

from the little town of ———, on our way to L—— W——. It is a bright morning in winter, and the fresh crisp air braces us for the four-mile trudge and the steep hill that lies before us. We are a cheerful party, some five or six in number, each laden with bag or satchel in which are stored provisions for the day, with books, tracts, &c. Our road lies up hill nearly half the way, then over undulating ground, till we turn in at a gateway and reach a grassy slope, from the top of which we survey the whole scene of the navvies' labour. The valley lies before us, and as we look up it the eye can trace its winding course far away among the hills, whose soft lines meet and mingle at each bend. The moorland stream comes down apace flooded by melting snows from the hill-sides that shut it in. Immediately below us lies the deep slit known as the "puddle trench," which navvy hands are cutting across the valley, and which will contain the foundation and core of the huge bank which is to turn our valley into a reservoir. A few men are at work even to-day, and the stillness of the morning is broken by the groaning and creaking of the steam-pumps by which the trench is kept clear of water. We descend to the level of the valley, and make our way across to the opposite side, and then through the wood which clothes the slope, our path leading up the valley, and in a line parallel to it. Through the wood for nearly a mile, and then we come to a smaller valley branching off from the main one and sloping upwards from it. Here stands our village—here are the dwellings of our navvies and the scene of our work. The first place to which we go, and to which I will introduce the reader, is the school. It is a good-sized brick building, containing a spacious school-room and a

very diminutive apartment for the school-mistress, who sleeps in a little chamber more like a small ship's cabin than a room, and has for sitting-room another almost equally diminutive. The school-room is furnished with tables, desks, and benches, and all the apparatus necessary for day-school and Sunday-school. I must say a word, before I go further, about the day-school. We had been at work at L—— W—— a long time before we could obtain this boon for the navvies. The building in which it was held was built by the men's employers for general purposes. It was to be a place of worship, a place of amusement, or instruction, as occasion might offer. For some time it was used on Sundays by representatives of various denominations, who held meetings, preached, and had a Sunday-school in it. its destinies were next affected by the appearance of small-pox amongst the men, when it was used as an hospital. The small-pox departed, the school was thoroughly cleansed, and was handed over to us for the use of our Sunday-school, which had hitherto been held in the church. A very unsatisfactory attempt at a day-school had before this been made, but with no visible result. The children of the place were a little band of wild savages—wild in appearance and in manners. Most of them knew a great deal more of the world and its wickedness than their age warranted, and were as ignorant of better things as it was possible to be. We succeeded at last in obtaining the appointment of a trained schoolmistress. Fortunate in our choice, we secured one who, in spite of great difficulties, and even some hardships, remained with us till the work was ended. She proved admirably suited to the work, and before long the aspect of the place, as far as the children affected it,

was entirely changed, The school was, after a time, placed under Government inspection, and obtained very favourable reports It is very creditable to the inhabitants of the huts that when they were called upon to pay an extra sixpence a week in their rent for the support of the school, they so highly appreciated the boon that no grumbllng was occasioned by the tax. The sum thus raised was supplemented by a private contribution. But, to return. As soon as we arrive in the school, everything is made ready for the day's work, but we have generally been preceded by one or two of the men who have been busy getting the forms arranged for each class. And now the bell is rung, and the scholars begin to assemble. All ages are represented in the stream that flows through the open door, from the aged man who leans on his stick to the infant who can just walk, and is led by an elder brother or sister. All come to learn ; none of the adult scholars can be pursuaded to act as teachers, unless on a very rare emergency. And, indeed, not a few of the men come there to learn their letters ; the majority have yet to acquire the power of reading with any facility, and only one here and there can read, when he comes, with tolerable correctness. I know of many men who left L—— W—— with books among their most treasured possessions, who but for the Sunday-school would have gone as they came, quite unable to read anything but the sign of a public-house. The adult class numbers about twenty, and the children bring the total up to nearly one hundred. Having opened the school with prayers and a hymn—always heartily sung—as the muster of teachers is good, and my presence not required when once all are fairly at work, I will ask the reader to accompany me in a walk

about the little village. There are three rows of huts sloping upward from the school towards the wood; besides these are a few outlying buildings which bring the number up to thirty-five. Each of these huts is inhabited by a married couple, who are landlord and landlady to as many lodgers as they can find room for. Just now, when the work is in full swing, the huts are very full, over-crowded some would say, as I think rightly, but it is a crowd that goes and comes and does not complain. Most of the men are still in bed this winter morning, some are within at their breakfasts, but of some we get a sight without entering the huts. Several of those we encounter have an appearance the reverse of prepossessing—the appearance of men who were very drunk last night, and with whom the bad beer and the raw spirit which pleased them then have left a splitting headache and a bad temper for their morning's entertainment. They are nursing a thirst which they cannot quench till mid-day, when the beershop will open. Others we see who have just turned out, and are standing outside the huts with bare arms and neck, having a good wash. The navvy is generally a man of clean habits, and knows well the value and the pleasures of a wash after his day's work and his night's rest. One man turns as we pass, and lifts his streaming face to look at us. I recognize a friend, and stop.

"Hullo, Somerset! not at the school this morning?"

"No, sir, not this morning; I laid a bit later than usual, but I'll come in this afternoon."

My friend, whose grand name does not imply connection with any noble family, but merely that his home is in Somersetshire, is a regular Sunday scholar, and I don't like to see him absent, but I know what his work is,

and cannot find much fault with his extra dose of sleep on Sunday morning. He doesn't look like one of the topers. His eyes are bright, and his weather-beaten face the picture of health. All the women are busy—making beds, getting breakfast, some baking, some cooking already for the dinner; most of them, as we catch glimpses of them at the doors, look worried and driven, careful and troubled about many things, and evidently completely deprived of anything like Sunday's rest. At one hut which we pass the landlady comes to the door and wishes us good morning. She is a very comfortable woman, with a bright cheerful face; she is clean and neat, and appears, unlike her neighbours, to have no pressing work on hand.

"Good morning, Mrs, Sharp; how are you this morning?" "First-rate, thank you, sir; and how's yourself? Won't you step in a bit, I'm all alone." "All at school?" I say, as we accept the invitation. "Oh yes, they're all gone, and a good job it is for them and for me too." "Yes, you get a quieter Sunday than your neighbours do." "Aye, that I do, sir, and much need of it. We women is worked like slaves. With nine or ten men to look after and wait on there aint much rest, and as for a bit of quiet for reading or thinking about one's soul, it isn't for the likes of us. I'm very thankful for my Sundays, I can tell you, sir. I've got a good set of lodgers—they're very good chaps, and don't give near so much trouble as some. I got a fresh one in yesterday. I didn't much care about having any more, but there was room for one, and I didn't want to offend Mr.——so I took him; but I just told him he'd have to behave himself like the rest. He didn't much want to go to school this morning, but the others talked him round,

and I fancy some of them lent him a thing or two, for he hadn't got no Sunday clothes." I like going to No. 13; but we must not linger here, it is not a fair specimen. In no other hut will you find the same peace and quiet this Sunday morning. We must visit others this afternoon, now we should only be in the way.

"I'll take the key of the church with me," I say, as we rise to go, and Mrs. Sharp reaches it for me from the nail where it always hangs; and so we pass up between the rows and towards the wood. A little way above the huts, standing back under the shadow of the trees, is our church. It is not a handsome structure, nor can it boast of anything that could be described as architecture. If it has any beauty, it is that of simplicity, set off by the lovely frame of stately woods in which it is seen. The windows are square, and the only ecclesiastical features it possesses are its high-pitched roof and the little bell-tower which adorns its western gable. Within there is less of the picturesque than without. The walls are plastered and whitewashed, and the only break in the monotonous white neatness is caused by the presence of a large round stove, whose black flue, despairing of concealment, ascends with honest straightforwardness to the hole made for it in the roof. Neat wooden benches supply seats for about 100 persons; and a plain communion-table and reading-desk, complete the furniture. We have no service here till the evenings, the clergyman who takes it having to officiate first at morning and afternoon services in his parish church. So we do not stay now, but having just seen that all is right and ready for the evening, we go on our way. There is one other public building in our village. It is one of the out-liers I spoke of just now, and is

known by the name of the Shant. In other words, it is the public-house of the place, but it is under very strict rules. No spirits are sold here, only beer. It is open only at stated times, and for short periods. Sometimes it opens only to serve those who fetch the beer away, and in the evening it is open for an hour, and the men may go and sit there and drink their beer, but this is not allowed on Sundays. By this time the morning school is over, and when we return we find the teachers busy, some clearing away books, other unpacking their provisions, and making ready for the pic-nic meal which is dignified by the name of dinner. The mid-day rest is very welcome. It is pleasant to stroll away into the woods, or down to the bank of the river, and to enjoy a little Sunday quiet till the bell rings again for afternoon school at two o'clock.

CHAPTER III.

I WILL now once more ask the reader to accompany me to the huts, this time to enter one or two, and make acquaintance with their inhabitants. Dinner, the great event of the day, being over, we can count on a welcome which might have been denied us in the morning. I must choose those huts where there are sick ones to be visited in preference to others. The interior of the huts is the same in each, and one description will serve for all. The outer door opens into the kitchen, which serves as the general living room. It is a good-sized room, open to the roof. The floor is of brick, and the furniture very simple, consisting of a long deal table with forms on each side of it, a few

chairs, and perhaps an arm-chair for the special use of the landlord. The walls are more or less decorated, according to the taste of the inmates, and the beams, which run across just within reach, are hung with men's clothes, handkerchiefs, and so on. At one end of the room is the range, and at the other a door leading into an inner apartment. This inner room is rather smaller than the other, and is generally used as the men's sleeping room. In this case it is furnished with five large wooden bedsteads, constructed in very simple fashion, and each one supposed to accommodate two men. Above this room, and in the slope of the roof, is another which is reached by a ladder from the outer room, and which is generally occupied by the landlord and his family. In some cases, however, this arrangement is reversed, and the lodgers are stowed away in the loft. In the first hut we enter we find a number of men gathered round the fire. All are smoking, some reading, some talking, while at the table a game of dominoes is going on. We notice that the favourite periodicals seem to be of the lower-class newspaper kind. Some of the men take no notice whatever of our presence, and make no reply to our greeting. Some, on the other hand, make a move, and invite us to a chair near the fire, and from one or two we get a welcome which is cordial, if not loudly expressed. We ask for the landlady; one of the men calls to her, and she appears at the top of the ladder leading to the upper room. "Come up, if you please, sir," she says; and we go, knowing that it is there we are most wanted. It is a terribly close room that we enter, with a sickly smell that tells of over-crowding. There are three beds in the small space, one of which is occupied by the patient

whom we have come to see. It is not a navvy, but the daughter of a navvy, and the wife of a navvy, a girl of about twenty, with a face to which long sickness has brought more beauty than it would have had in strong health—a tender fragile being, seeming altogether out of place amid these rough surroundings. She has been ill a long time, and is not far from the end, and her sufferings are very great, terribly aggravated by the foul air, coarse food, and rough though kind nursing. It is a very sad sight, rendered more sad by what we learn of the sufferer's past life. Born in a navvy's hut, wandering all her life from place to place with her parents, surrounded always by sights and sounds of evil, what could she know of good? In no place where her father has worked before has any provision been made for the mental or spiritual welfare of the navvies or their children—no school, no church. Her mother could teach her nothing but the same poor miserable creed she held herself, of which the chief tenet was, that this world was so bad, so hard and rough, so toilsome, that no change could well be for the worse. But the girl's eyes lighten as we enter, and she smiles a welcome. It was long before my visits were so received. At first she barely tolerated them. They seemed to her to imply that her illness was more serious than she would allow it to be, and they threatened to disturb the quiet of her ignorance. That false peace was disturbed at last, and now, knowing that her sickness is unto death, she can look forward to the end with peace which no fear can disturb, for it is founded on the simple yet profound knowledge of Him who is mighty to save. One such case as this is ample reward for any amount of care

and pains which we have spent at L—— W——, and one such case seems to me to proclaim with burning eloquence the needs of our navvy population. Neglected, degraded, brutalised men are a sight sad enough, but to see women in the same state moves one to deeper disgust, and to greater pity and remorse. The next case of sickness that awaits me is that of a young man, a navvy, struck down in the pride of llfe, and dying like the girl we have just left, of consumption. One gets into a way of thinking of navvies as strong above their fellows, and it is a pitiable sight to see one with pale sunken cheeks, and shrunken limbs. It happens, however, not unfrequently. The strong frame is over-taxed, the man works sometimes under a burning sun, sometimes in driving rain or snow, sometimes up to his middle in water. He generally perseveres long after he ought to have given in, and then gives in once for all. We find the sick man propped up in an arm-chair by the fire. He has a very bad weary look in his face. Time hangs heavily on his hands. He has absolutely nothing to do. He cannot read, and there is no one save occasional visitors like ourselves to read to him ; he can do nothing but think —think of the health he has lost, of the sickness which is wasting him away, of his pains and of his weariness. Such thinking is apt to breed discontent. It seems hard to rebuke his murmuring ; for the short time we can spend with him we must try our best to make him cheerful. We read to him a little, and he asks us to pray with him. This we do in the name of Him who, while he promised tribulation to His disciples, bade them also be of good comfort. Then we try to talk cheerfully about the supply of his present wants. It is

pleasant to hear that his mates are very kind to him, and bring him each pay-day a contribution from their own wages. It is their habit to do so, and each man, as he spares a shilling for his sick friend, knows that in his own need the same kindness will be shown to him. Before our visits to the huts are concluded, the children are already pouring out of school, and preparations are being made for the evening meal. The hour of tea is a very welcome one to our teachers ; the meal can be had in rather more comfort than dinner, and there is a delicious sense of relief at the thought that the day's work is over, and the rest now enjoyed has been fairly earned. Some of the teachers, however, have still something to do ; there are tracts to be changed, visits to be paid, and one of them has to devote half an hour to the management of the lending library. In one corner of the school-room stands a large cupboard, always locked, except for one half-hour on Sunday afternoon. It is full of books, and to those who subscribe the large sum of one penny per month, these books are lent. They are in great demand, and many of them have been read and read again, till there is very little left of them. Among the many mistakes which we made in our work at L----W——, one of the chief, I think, was in the management of this library. We began with a very fair supply of books, to which we were largely assisted by the Pure Literature and other societies. These books were eagerly sought for, and for a time supplied the needs of the readers, but the supply was not maintained, nor were new books obtained in sufficient numbers to keep up the usefulness of the library to its highest point. It would have been well, too, if, in connection with our

library, we had had an organisation for the sale of cheap and pure literature. A little was done in this way, but, I am afraid, a great deal more was done by the vendors of pernicious literature. We had our schools, our reading-room, and night-school in winter, our savings-bank and clothing-club, but I fear we did not at the time realise the importance of the ample supply of good and cheap reading. Although among the navvies the greater number are unable to read, yet one meets with a good many who can do so, and it is probable that in each hut one would find at least one man who was able to read to his companions. Such talents were generally appreciated, and often on Sunday evening, in winter-time, the men would gather round the fire in the hut, while one read aloud, sometimes a tract, sometimes a newspaper, and now and then a chapter of the Bible. But meanwhile the evening is closing in, it is nearly church time. The bell begins to tinkle, and the square windows give forth a bright light into the outer darkness. And now two or three of us set out to visit between us every hut, to use what influence we may to bring their inmates to church. It is not altogether a pleasing task. One feels rather guilty of an impertinence when one disturbs a pleasant party in their own house, and remonstrates with them for being there, and urges them to turn out into the cold night air. However, the visits are always kindly received, and are by no means fruitless. When we reach the church we find it warm and cheerful. There is a good fire in the stove, and the lamps which hang from the roof burn brightly. The benches are filling, and when the bell ceases every seat is full. It is always so on winter evenings, whereas in summer the congre-

gations are usually smaller, for the men wander off into the woods and are not to be found in the huts as now. The service consists of evening prayer and a sermon. It is conducted with the utmost simplicity, but varied with as much music as possible. We sing as many hymns as can be conveniently introduced. I think that no stranger entering the church during service could fail to be struck with the great heartiness with which the navvies joined in it. Care is taken that all who can read should be provided with books, and the little trouble involved is amply repaid by the heartiness of the responses. From his desk the preacher looked Sunday after Sunday on an array of earnest faces, while the solemn thought pressed upon him that to many he was speaking for the first and last time. Every Sunday some new faces greeted him, while others were looked for in vain; for navvies are unsettled beings, always on the move, and many a one who came to church, and hoped to come again, found himself far away before the week was spent. And now our Sunday comes to an end, and with many a hearty shake of the hand, and with many a warm wish for our safe journey, we set off homewards.

Such is a navvy village as it has been, as it may be. Let it not be supposed that the above is a specimen of what is commonly found in such colonies. I have described an exceptional state of things; and, alas! the exception is a rare one. I had long supposed it to be so, judging from what I saw and heard at L——W—— I found there in large numbers men who were perfectly ready to welcome and appreciate any effort made for their spiritual good, but to whom all the ordinary means of such good were almost unknown.

In the autumn of last year we addressed inquiries to the managers of all the public works we could hear of in the country. The object of these inquiries was to ascertain the number of men employed, the extent to which they were lodged in huts, apart from other men, and the provision made for their spiritual needs in the way of schools, services, &c. The number of places from which answers were received was thirty-four. Out of these there were twelve at which were no huts, the men being lodged in towns or villages which happened to be sufficiently near. Thus, there were twenty-two places at which huts had been erected, and navvy colonies, more or less extensive, called into being.

The total number of huts reported was 843, giving an average of about 38 huts to each place.

The total number of men employed was 13,244, or an average of nearly 400 at each place.

I must here ask the reader to remember that these facts and figures are gathered from a comparatively small area. Our queries were addressed to the managers of some 70 different works, of which we heard merely by questioning the navvies at L——W——, and by studying the columns of the newspapers. There can be no doubt that the number of works in progress is very much larger than this.

But replies to our queries were received from only 34 places. Even so, we have information relating to the condition of 13,000 men, besides women and children. What the grand total would be if complete statistics could be gathered from the whole of England, it is difficult to guess.

For want, however, of larger information, we take our 13,000 as a sample, remembering that they are but a

sample, and ask—What provision is made for their moral and spiritual needs?

One of our queries was, "Have you any night-school, Sunday-school, or Sunday service?" These questions were answered in 22 cases by a comprehensive negative. These answers came in part from the 12 places where there were no huts, and implied that no schools or services existed especially for the navvies, although there may have been both in the town or village, but—the navvy would say—not for him. The next question was, "Does any regular Minister come?" To this, in 21 cases, the answer was "No." Out of the total number of 34 places we counted four only where was a Sunday service attended by navvies; two where they attended a Sunday-school; three where they had night-schools; and three where were day-schools for their children.

In each case the managers—to whom our inquiries were addressed—were invited to add such remarks to their replies as they thought fit. Some of these remarks are very striking, and show how differently our efforts were viewed by those in authority in different quarters.

One manager appends a warning to his remarks to the effect that if any missionary is coming he must not be thin-skinned. Another tells us that "navvies don't care much for ministers, the idea being that money is wanted more than souls." This is, indeed, a most unfortunate idea, and one which I have never met with among navvies. At L——W——we certainly never asked the men for their money, save once a year, when we held a missionary meeting, and had a collection, which was almost always a good one. Our observations led us to the conclusion that no man is more ready and willing to pay

for what he gets than the navvy. He generally earns good wages, and his habit is to spend them freely. He will give generously, almost lavishly, to help a sick mate and if he chance to meet an old acquaintance out of work and on the tramp, he will not fail to bestow a shilling on him.

At L——W——the navvies were never asked for any contributions toward the expenses of the church, but had it become necessary at any time to appeal to them we should have done so with the utmost confidence that the response would be made not grudgingly or of necessity, but most readily, by many cheerful givers. We gave away many Bibles and Prayer Books, but I believe as many were bought as were given, and I am sure that in most cases the purchase was preferred to the gift. Many a time have men come to us with the request that we would buy for them a Bible or a Prayer Book, and when asked what price they wished to give, have put down half-a-sovereign, or even a sovereign, saying, "I want a real good one, with references and maps, and I'm not particular to a shilling or two."

My own experience, therefore, leads me not to be alarmed by the opinion expressed above, but rather to think that if any effort to minister to the spiritual needs of navvies is to succeed, opportunity must be offered to the navvies themselves to participate in it. I would not urge them to give, but I would let them know that they were free to give if they would, and I believe they would not be slow to avail themselves of the opportunity. The last of these "remarks" which I will quote is—

"Sir,—We have been here nearly four years, and we have never been visited by any minister. Our job is nearly finished. No one has ever so much as sent us a tract to read on a Sunday.

"The Manager."

I said I would claim my reader's sympathy for navvies on the ground of facts; and surely this one fact, even if it stood alone, would be sufficient ground. But we have seen already that it does not stand alone. It is merely the description, plainer and more outspoken than usual, of the state of things in many places.

If, then, these things be so, the question is, Can anything be done to mend matters? What can be done? and to whom must we look for the doing of it? One very common reply to these questions is, "Let the clergy of the several districts in which these navvies are look to it; let them provide all that is needed—services, school, and so on—for the use of these people, who are their parishioners, if only for a time." This sounds plausible enough, and there are cases in which all this can be done, and is done. But imagine a case—such as I have seen—of a large district, with a dense population, and a small, over-worked staff of clergy. The centre of the parish, in which dwell five-sixths of the whole population, is a manufacturing town, but the parish boundaries stretch far away, and enclose distant moorland hamlets, and large tracts, it may be, of almost uninhabited country. Into one of these outlying districts come the navvies. There, within the boundaries of the parish, but perhaps four or five miles from the town, is formed the navvy village, requiring a parochial organisation of its own.

In many cases the old saying holds good, and everybody's business is nobody's business. There is no lack of people to cry shame on the neglect which the navvies suffer, and to say, "Something ought to be done for these people." The difficulty is to find those who say, "This is my business; I must do something for them."

Generally speaking the responsibility is very widespread. Wherever a large number of navvies is gathered to execute some extensive public work, there is sure to be also a large number of people who derive benefit from their presence. In the first place their employers are benefitted. Then the neighbouring land-owners, on whose property the works are executed, derive pecuniary advantage. The tradesmen, too, of the neighbouring towns and villages profit largely, for the navvies spend their earnings freely. On all these there rests directly some share of responsibility. And indirectly it spreads wider still. If the works are of public utility, then on the public in general falls a share of the burden, and to each and all of us belongs the duty of seeing, so far as we may, that the men who make our railways, our reservoirs, our docks and harbours, are not uncared for in the things which concerns their souls.

To many, no doubt, the peculiar needs of navvies in this respect have been unknown. It has been the object of these pages to make them known, at least to some, and if that object has been in any degree obtained, I may appeal to my readers to render help how, when, and where they can. Many, no doubt, would help willingly, but lack the opportunity. With the view of offering such opportunity, and of ministering in the way which seems most likely to be effectual to the needs of the navvy population, it has been proposed to form a Society for this special purpose. There are already existing so many religious societies and agencies, that the idea of forming a new one is not a little formidable. Yet if a new need is discovered, which can be met by none of the old agencies, to establish a new one seems the right and proper course. In the present case there

is no need of a very extensive organisation or of a very large income. A little would go a long way; and if only a small beginning could be made, the way would become plainer towards more complete operations.

In any case I trust that the present account of an almost unknown section of the community will have proved interesting to the readers of the *Quiver*, and that it will have enlisted their sympathy with the spiritual and moral needs of our navvies, which hitherto have scarcely ever been prominently brought before the public.